

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS YEREVAN 001842

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR DRL AND EUR/CACEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: MURDER SUSPECT RE-ELECTED AS TOWN MAYOR

1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

-----  
MURDER CHARGES DON'T DISSUADE VOTERS...  
-----

2. (SBU) The campaign for mayor of the town of Nor Hajn (about 20 minutes outside of Yerevan in the Kotayk region) took a bizarre turn when the incumbent, Armen Keshishyan, shot dead his friend-turned rival. Because Keshishyan had not gone to trial before the election -- held on October 9 -- his name was not removed from the ballot. Voters were evidently not dissuaded by Keshishyan's actions and re-elected him, even though he was in custody on the day of the ballot. At the time of the shooting -- which took place in broad daylight in front of witnesses -- Keshishyan was arguing with his rival about pork-barrel projects with which the mayor could not compete. While there were reports of some electoral violations during last week's balloting, the local branch of the election watchdog NGO "It's Your Choice" told us that the voting was mostly fair. Government contacts confirmed to us that Keshishyan's opponent did not contest the results to Armenia's Central Electoral Commission.

-----  
...EVEN WHEN THE SMOKING GUN IS FROM THE PM  
-----

3. (SBU) Local media seized on the story not only because of Keshishyan's involvement in the bizarre murder story but because of claims that the murder weapon was a gift from Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Markarian. An unidentified representative of the Prime Minister's office later reportedly confirmed to the media that Markarian often gives guns as gifts to close friends and that he had distributed over 500 such weapons during his ten years in office.

-----  
COMMENT: FROM MAYOR'S OFFICE TO JAIL CELL?  
-----

3. (SBU) Comment: This latest example of political passions running wild in Armenia's regions comes at a precarious time for Armenia. GOAM authorities are facing heavy pressure to demonstrate mature democratic institutions during upcoming local elections later this month, the much-anticipated November 27 constitutional referendum and the 2007 (parliamentary) and 2008 (presidential) elections. Armenian legislation allows a criminal suspect to run for public office but requires resignation if found guilty. The public and donor community will be watching carefully to see how the courts handle Keshishyan's case.

EVANS